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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 000557

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SUBJECT: LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS -- KEY OPPOSITION PARTY
RALLIES ITS BASE; NEW PARTY TRIES TO MAKE MARK

REF: JAKARTA 520 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph L. Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: It's a full court press ahead of April 9, election day for Indonesia's national legislature and other bodies. Working to mobilize its considerable grassroots base, Indonesia's key opposition party, PDI-P, held a large rally on March 24 in Jakarta. Golkar Party is also revving up its engines, with party chief VP Kalla leading rallies in populous West Java. In the meantime, several NGO's are urging that the GOI postpone the elections, citing concerns about voter list inaccuracies and alleged voter fraud. The GOI says the elections will be held as scheduled. END SUMMARY.

KEY OPPOSITION PARTY SHOWS GRASSROOTS APPEAL

12. (SBU) Indonesia's many political parties are working to get out the vote ahead of the April 9 national parliamentary elections. Larger parties are holding rallies, while some smaller parties are saving their money and doing door to door campaigning. Leading candidates from wealthier parties such as President Yudhoyono's Partai Demokrat (PD) and Golkar are using chartered airplanes and helicopters to barnstorm through their constituencies. All parties are focused on teaching the voters how to actually mark the complicated ballots correctly and vote for the party of their choice.

13. (SBU) Trying to catch up to the President's PD party in the polls, Indonesia's main opposition party has been active. On March 24, Poloff and Pol FSN attended a grassroots rally for the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) in Jakarta. The rally, which exemplified PDI-P's populist-based appeal, was aimed primarily at the working-class poor.

14. (U) In true Javanese easy-going style, the rally got off to a slow start due to confusion about time and a last minute change of venue. Candidates and party members showed up to the rally impressively (if somewhat comically), in small motorized pedicabs flying red PDI-P banners. The vehicles were emblazoned with PDI-P's ballot number, "28," and party leader (and former president) Megawati's picture. All the seats inside the extremely hot venue were filled with a sea of men wearing red PDI-P shirts, sprinkled with a few Muslim women wearing headscarves. About 40 young men danced to traditional dangdut (Indonesian folk) music.

15. (U) A floor to ceiling banner on the stage bore Megawati's beaming countenance. The banner read: "We are nothing without the people; we are big because of the people; we fight for the people." At the bottom, a poster declared (apparently paraphrasing Lincoln): "Together, we'll make a government for and by the poor people." Cellular phone

Company Telkomsel, the rally sponsor, announced that if the audience sms'ed "Mega space 888" they will be registered for free vouchers and will get a ringtone with Megawati's voice.

¶6. (U) Very few women attended, partly because new regulations for child protection prohibit the participation in rallies of children under the voting age (17). While this is meant only to protect children, in practice it limits women's participation in rallies, since many have to stay home with their children. Some choose to ignore this, however, and the number one national campaign violation so far is bringing children to rallies.

VICE PRESIDENT LEADS RALLY IN WEST JAVA

¶7. (SBU) Another heavyweight party is also working to mobilize its supporters. The Golkar Party, contending with PDI-P for the number two spot in opinion polls, focused its recent campaigning on West Java, Indonesia's largest province by population with over 42 million residents. Golkar is still stinging from its loss in the gubernatorial race there last year to an Islamic-oriented party (PKS/PAN)-supported coalition.

¶8. (SBU) Golkar Chair, Vice President Kalla, told crowds that "Without West Java, Golkar is nothing." Kalla, who has said he "is ready" to be Golkar's presidential candidate if his party does well in the April 9 elections, has adopted a populist approach during this campaign and he did his best to excite the crowd. He promised them more job opportunities and free education.

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NEW PARTY AIMS TO CROSS THRESHOLD

¶9. (C) In the meantime, a new party is trying to make a mark. The populist, secular-oriented Gerindra Party, which has yet to hold a Jakarta rally but has held rallies across the country, may be the only new party to cross the parliamentary threshold (see reftel). Fueled by Gerindra presidential candidate general (ret'd) Prabowo Subianto's (and his family's) money and connections, it has been doing well for a new party, polling at roughly 4%. Gerindra has almost twice the support of Prabowo's former military colleague Wiranto (one name only) and his Hanura Party.

¶10. (C) The head of the Farmers' Association, an NGO, Prabowo has emphasized education, farmer's rights and poverty alleviation in his campaign. Despite his dubious history as a military commander, including accusations of human rights abuses, he claims that his is "the party of the dispossessed." If Gerindra can sustain its performance, it seems likely that it will cross the parliamentary threshold (2.5% of the national vote) that the law requires for a party to enter Parliament.

CALLS FOR POSTPONING POLLS FALL ON DEAF EARS

¶11. (SBU) Finally, two NGO's have added their voices to calls for the GOI to delay the polls. TEPI, the Indonesian Voters Committee, and the Indonesian Parliamentary Center have said that the national Election Commission (KPU) should postpone the election until it has resolved alleged voter list inaccuracies, corrected and redistributed misprinted ballots, and addressed allegations of fraud in voter lists. However, the KPU, despite admitting to the need to replace 5.7 million invalid ballot papers, has so far clung to the April 9 legislative election date and there is no concrete indication of any sort at this time that the GOI will shift that stance.

HUME